

Executive Registry

83-42327

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September 5, 1983
9:00 a.m.

PRESIDENTIAL TELEVISION ADDRESS: FLIGHT 007
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 1983

My fellow Americans, I am coming before you tonight about a matter that continues to weigh heavily on our minds -- the attack last week by the Soviet Union against 269 innocent men, women and children aboard an unarmed Korean passenger plane. This is a crime against humanity we can never forget.

Our prayers tonight are with the victims and their families in this terrible time of grief. Our hearts go out to all of them -- to brave people like Kathryn McDonald, the wife of a Congressman, whose composure and eloquence on the day of her husband's death are a tribute to the ideals he so courageously represented.

The parents of one slain couple wired me: "Our daughter . . . and her husband . . . died on Korean Airline Flight 007. Their deaths were the result of the Soviet Union violating every concept of human rights." The emotions of these parents -- grief, shock, anger -- are shared by civilized people everywhere. We are witnessing an explosion of condemnation throughout the world.

Let me make one thing plain: There is absolutely no justification, either legal or moral, for what the Soviets did. As one newspaper in India said, "If every passenger plane . . . is fair game for home air forces . . . it will be the end to civil aviation as we know it."

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Nor is this the first time the Soviet Union has shot at and hit a civilian airliner when it overflew their territory. As a matter of fact, in 1978, the Soviets positively identified one aircraft as a civilian airliner. The pilot read the name on the side of the aircraft, and then was given a command to shoot it down. The plane escaped destruction by making a crash landing on a frozen lake, but innocent civilians lost their lives.

The United States Government does not fire on foreign aircraft over U.S. territory, even though commercial aircraft from the Soviet Union and Cuba have overflowed sensitive U.S. military facilities. We and other civilized countries believe in the tradition of offering help to mariners and pilots who are lost or in distress, on the sea or in the air. We believe in following procedures to prevent a tragedy, not to provoke one.

But despite the savagery of their crime, the universal reaction against it, and the evidence of their complicity, the Soviets still refuse to tell the truth. They have persistently refused to admit that their pilot fired on the Korean aircraft. Indeed, they have not even told the Russian people that a plane was shot down. The Soviet Government calls the whole thing an accident. I call it murder. Let me repeat the stark words of the Soviet pilot himself after signaling that his missile warheads were locked on the airliner: "I have executed the launch. The target is destroyed. I am breaking off attack."

The world must hear these words. Tomorrow the Security Council of the United Nations will hear them when a tape recording of the pilot's comments are played in public.

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I have long believed that a system which, at its core, renounces God and humanitarian ideals, wantonly disregards individual rights and the value of human life, and seeks constantly to expand and dominate other nations, poses a serious danger to the civilized world. This latest outrage is just one more proof of the glaring gap between Soviet words and deeds.

In recent years, the Soviets have zipped up one of the most elaborate and expensive propaganda machines in the world -- all designed to portray themselves as peacemakers. But now that carefully cultivated image is being stripped bare. Rather than come clean to the world; rather than immediately and publicly investigate the incident, explain to the world how it came about, punish those guilty of this crime, cooperate in efforts to find the wreckage, recover the bodies, offer compensation to the families, and work to prevent a repetition, the Soviets are doing just the opposite. They are mobilizing their entire government behind a massive cover-up. Who do they think they're kidding? The world demands the truth -- now.

Not long ago, in a tragic accident, a Soviet passenger boat struck a bridge while traveling down the Volga River. Hundreds of Soviet citizens died. The Soviet Government immediately had one of its most senior officials lead an inquiry. Within a very short time, the government announced its findings. Negligence was found and procedures were instituted to prevent further accidents. Certainly the Soviet Government bears a heavy responsibility for launching a similar investigation of its attack on the civilian airliner.

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The Soviet Union is paying a heavy price in the eyes of world opinion. They can change their attitude, and I pray they will. But, as long as they continue to mislead and distort, the civilized world will condemn them. If they meant to engage in an act of intimidation, they have provoked exactly the opposite reaction. For on the lips of people throughout the world tonight is one word, one word directed at the Soviet leadership. That word is defiance; defiance in the face of this unspeakable act and the political system that excuses it and tries to cover it up.

Now when I heard about this attack, my first reaction was probably like yours -- horror mixed with fury. Who can forget that, over the years, this same regime has imprisoned half of Europe; suppressed peaceful movement toward democracy in Czechoslovakia and Poland; invaded, gassed and killed citizens in Afghanistan; condoned the torture and suffering of millions in Southeast Asia; and used terrorism and Cuban surrogates to destabilize countries throughout Africa and Latin America?

In the old days, "an eye for an eye" would have been just and appropriate. Today such retribution would be just, but it is no longer appropriate.

The world has always been filled with danger, but now it is even more dangerous. In this nuclear world, certain rules from olden times can no longer apply. As citizens of the United States, we are responsible first and foremost for the safety and freedom, not just of ourselves but our children and grandchildren.

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It is the duty of all of us, as leaders and citizens of the civilized world, to respond firmly but calmly to provocation. We want justice. We must act not just for today, but also for the long-term future.

We must steadfastly gird ourselves for what John F. Kennedy called "the long twilight struggle." We must see the Soviets as they are, rather than as some would like them to be. From the beginning of this Administration, our policy toward the Soviets has been based on this realism. It recognizes the one, hard reality that has never changed: The Soviets respect only those who live and negotiate from a position of strength.

Our most immediate challenge to this atrocity is to ensure that we make the skies safer and that we seek just compensation for the families of those who were killed. That's why I returned to Washington to consult with my advisers, with congressional leaders of both parties, and through Secretary Shultz, with representatives of other countries about the steps we should take.

My meeting with the congressional leadership yesterday was particularly useful, and I was encouraged by the fine sense of bipartisanship and the many constructive suggestions I received. I will be working in the closest cooperation with the Congress in carrying out the U.S. response to this incident.

For our part, this is what we have done and are trying to do:

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-- We immediately told the world the shocking facts. We did so honestly, responsibly, and carefully, as we determined the facts ourselves.

-- We are conducting and assisting search efforts in international waters near the tragedy. The U.S. and Japan have also asked the Soviets to extend the search into their territorial waters, but so far, they have not agreed.

-- We have notified the Soviets that we will not renew our bilateral agreement for cooperation in the field of transportation, since it would be unthinkable to offer cooperation in this area so long as the Soviets threaten the security of civil aviation.

-- We have also reaffirmed our previous order denying the Soviet airline -- Aeroflot -- the right to fly to the United States, and are examining whether there are steps which can be taken to end other Aeroflot activities in this country.

-- We have notified the Soviets that we are suspending negotiations on several bilateral arrangements which we had under consideration.

-- I am asking the Congress to pass a joint resolution of condemnation of this Soviet crime.

-- Along with these steps, we are continuing to press the Soviet leaders to follow the honorable course of investigating and disclosing the facts, taking corrective action, making restitution, and providing concrete assurances that such wanton behavior will not be repeated. I have instructed Secretary

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Shultz to make this matter the center of his meeting scheduled this week with Foreign Minister Gromyko.

-- Truth is a great weapon and one the Soviets fear. In times such as these, few assets are more important than the Voice of America and Radio Liberty -- our primary means of getting the truth to the Russian people. The sad fact is, our broadcast equipment is antiquated and the Soviets spend more to jam Western broadcasts than the entire worldwide VOA budget. Tonight, I urge the Congress to end the delay and to pass our VOA modernization program, so that the truth about situations like this can be heard throughout totalitarian lands.

Some steps we can take ourselves. But the most effective short-term steps must be in concert with other concerned nations. At least a dozen countries were represented in that downed aircraft. The Republic of Korea lost more lives than any other. This issue is not between the Soviet Union and the United States; it is between the Soviet regime and humanity.

I am directing Secretary of State Shultz, Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick at the U.N. and our ambassadors in many lands to sit down as soon as they can with their counterparts from other nations to see what the civilized world, united, can do to address this issue. It is essential that we act not alone, but together.

Already, we are taking some steps forward:

First, along with Korea and Japan, we called an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council. Debate began Friday. On that first day, Korea, Japan, Canada, Australia, the

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Netherlands, Pakistan, France, China, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Zaire all joined us in expressing horror at the Soviet action.

Second, we will work with other nations to seek reparations for all who were killed. There are forums, including the International Court of Justice, where these crimes should legitimately be settled. And let me say that I believe compensation to the families of the victims is an absolute moral duty which the Soviets must assume.

Third, and very important, we are cooperating with other countries to find better means to ensure the safety of civil aviation. Unless and until the Soviets satisfy the cries of humanity for justice, their airline Aeroflot should not be accepted as a normal member of the international civil air community. And we have joined with other countries to press the International Civil Aviation Organization to investigate this crime at an urgent special session of the Council.

Fourth, we are listening carefully to the views of private groups, both American and international, who have a special interest in civil air safety -- airline pilots, passenger associations and others -- so that we can work with them to improve the security of air transport. Their outrage is loud and clear.

Fifth, in the economic area in general, we will redouble our efforts with our Allies to end the flow of military and strategic items to the Soviet Union. We have already made progress in this area. We hope for more.

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We will pursue every course of action to present the Soviets with the just demands of the world public. That is why Secretary Shultz intends to proceed with his scheduled meeting with Foreign Minister Gromyko in Madrid this week.

As we work with other countries to see that justice is done, I hope that all of us, as citizens of this great and free land, will remember the larger lesson of this terrible tragedy. We live in a dangerous world. We must keep our eyes on the long-term challenges to freedom and peace. The real test of our resolve is whether we have the will to remain strong, steady, and united.

Senator Henry Jackson, a wise and revered statesman, and one who probably understood the Soviets as well as any American in history, warned us, "the greatest threat the United States now faces is posed by the Soviet Union." But, Senator Jackson said: "If America maintains a strong deterrent -- and only if it does -- this Nation will continue to be a leader in the crucial quest for enduring peace among nations."

The late Senator made that statement only 41 days ago, on the Senate floor, speaking in behalf of the MX missile program -- a program he considered vital to restore America's strategic parity with the Soviets.

The Congress will be facing key votes on defense issues when it returns from recess. I urge the Members of that distinguished body: Ponder long and hard the Soviets' aggression before you cast any vote that would weaken the security and safety of the American people.

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I would also hope that the Europeans can now understand the need for the Pershing missiles -- missiles that would not be necessary if the Soviets were not already intimidating the continent with hundreds of SS-20 rockets, and if they did not insist on keeping them there. If the Soviets have no compunction about shooting down unarmed aircraft, will they have any compunction about shooting on an unprotected city?

Until the Soviets join the rest of the world community, we simply must have the strength to deal with them. That is why rebuilding this Nation's military and economic strength, and helping our allies and friends build theirs, has been such an important goal of this Administration from January 20, 1981.

When John F. Kennedy was President, defense spending as a share of the Federal budget was half again as high as today. And since that period, the Soviet Union has undertaken, and carried out, the most massive military build-up the world has ever known.

Realism and strength are essential. But, if we are to succeed in our long-term effort to bring the Soviets into the world community of nations, we must also talk to them. We must tell them what the world expects from them: The world expects their cooperation in building a safer place to live.

Peace is our top priority -- peace through strength and peace through mutual and verifiable reductions in the weapons of war. And that is why I have sent Ambassador Nitze back to Geneva for the next round of negotiations on intermediate-range nuclear weapons in Europe. Our policy of seeking to reduce the arms burden has not changed and will not change.

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My fellow citizens, as we come together in the true spirit of America, to help the families harmed by the Soviets' aggression, let us also rededicate ourselves to the goals we have pursued from the beginning of the Administration. Let us go forward with policies based on realism, strength and a willingness to talk. We know it will be hard to make a nation that rules its own people through force to cease using force against the rest of the world. But that is the task before us.

This is not a role we sought -- we preach no manifest destiny. But like Americans who began this country and brought forth this last, best hope of mankind, history has asked much of the Americans of our own time. Much we have already given. Much more we must be prepared to give.

Let us have faith, in Abraham Lincoln's words, "that right makes might, and in that faith let us to the end dare to do our duty as we understand it." If we do, if we stick together and move forward with courage, then history will record that some good did come from this monstrous wrong that we will carry with us and remember for the rest of our lives.

Thank you, God bless you, and good night.

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THE WHITE HOUSE

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MESSAGE NO. 849 CLASSIFICATION UNCLAS PAGES 11
 FROM Bob Kimmitt 456-2257 White House
 (NAME) (EXTENSION) (ROOM NUMBER)

MESSAGE DESCRIPTION KAL INCIDENT -- PRESIDENTIAL Speech

TO (AGENCY)	DELIVER TO:	DEPT/ROOM NO.	EXTENSION
State	Charlie Hill		
OSD	John Stanford		
CIA			
JCS	George Joulwan		
Treasury	David Chew		

REMARKS: Attached is current (11³⁰ am) draft. Comments received as of 0900 were incorporated. Additional comments/clearance required by 1300 today. Comments should be sent in writing to me via LDX -- telephonic coordination may be conducted with Bob Lilac at 395-4282.

Called

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